

Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

www.iowadnr.gov

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STATE AREAS TAKE HIT FROM FLOOD, TORNADOS

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Washed-out dikes and boat ramps, a steep drop in license sales, rearranged camping plans add up to a nearly \$12 million price tag on state wildlife, fishing and park areas in Iowa. The damage estimates follow heavy flooding and tornadoes earlier this season.

“Many needed projects will be delayed into future years because of damage or loss of revenue,” says Ken Herring, conservation and recreation division administrator of the DNR. In the meantime, he advises that the agency will do whatever it can to keep parks, state forests, fishing lakes and wildlife areas open to the public.

Much of Iowa’s public land lies along river corridors and took a direct hit as streams surged out of their banks and across what is usually dry land. The DNR’s wildlife bureau estimates the cost to restore structures such as levees, water control structures, ramps, parking lots, culverts, roads and buildings will be \$4 million. Another \$1 million will be felt in the form of lost revenue from croplands on many of the 35,000 acres managed as farm land on wildlife units.

Additionally, late summer projects, such as waterfowl-attracting wild rice plantings will not be possible in many areas. That will reduce the holding power of those areas for ducks and geese, causing many to fly right by on their southward migration in the coming weeks. “We had a lot of structural damage; there are still some areas just coming out of the water”, explains wildlife bureau chief Dale Garner. “We will look at some structural changes as we recover. We may lower some of the dikes and broaden them; make the slopes wider on the sides to reduce some of the pressure coming over.”

Not included in that estimate is the loss of hunting license revenue if wildlife population estimates are drastically lower.

On the fishing side of things, shoreline erosion, loss of in-stream habitat, repair to access roads for trout stocking and damaged fishing jetties are greeting anglers as the water recedes. Repair of those makes up \$500,000 of the \$1,760,000 price tag. Also included is an estimate of \$500,000 to repair the Big Spring and Manchester hatcheries. The Big Spring station near Elkader lost tens of thousands of trout and saw a near wipeout of its office and storage area.

And while many eyes will be on the electronic terminals that crank out hunting licenses this fall, there has been a dramatic downturn in fishing license sales for May, June and July. Those peak sales months felt a drop-off, but sales have recovered somewhat late this summer.

State parks were damaged to the tune of \$4,775,000 by strong winds, flooding, heavy rain and, again, lost revenue as they headed into what should have been the peak of their seasons. Herring estimates \$3,600,000 in actual damages to electrical transformers, lift stations, roads, parking lots and building foundations. Two park campgrounds remain closed due to acts of nature, with access limited in others.

And while wildlife and fisheries might estimate the loss of license revenue, the parks can point to lost camping receipts and refunds on camping, shelter and lodge reservations.

“Parks projects involving some new or renovated structures may be put on hold, pending more immediate repairs,” Herring says. “This will cause some pushback from groups that will view this delay as unacceptable.”

Much of the damage to state forestry stock and facilities came from tornadoes just before the flooding. Along with a grant program to help replant windbreaks, the price tag there is about \$260,000. Within the DNR’s law enforcement bureau, the physical loss was tagged at \$55,000 to fund flood repair at it’s Manchester district office. Herring points out, though, that a similar amount was paid out in overtime costs as officers assisted in evacuation, search and rescue and other security requirements.

“Roads, boat ramps, fish hatcheries, etcetera will be repaired within the abilities of the department’s budget,” Herring says. “(However), prioritization and reworking budgets and engineering projects will be necessary.”

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CAMPGROUNDS FILLING TO NEAR CAPACITY FOR LABOR DAY WEEKEND

DES MOINES – The Labor Day Weekend is shaping up to be a busy one in Iowa State Parks. Campers have reserved nearly every campsite with electricity available using the reservation system. That means campers will need to arrive early in the week to claim a first come, first serve site.

“Camping is a great way to spend quality time with friends and family and with the Labor Day Holiday, we know the campgrounds are going to be busy. We will be encouraging campers to be courteous to each other and be good neighbors,” said Kevin

Szcodronski, chief of the Iowa State Parks bureau. "Everyone is out to have a good time and it only takes one loud, disrespectful campsite to disrupt an entire campground."

Labor Day Weekend will be a busy so campers are encouraged to have patience and arrive early to set up on their site. "It would be wise for campers who do not have a reservation to call the park ahead of time to see what is available for first come, first serve campsites and adjust their arrival plans accordingly," Szcodronski said.

Some of the more heavily used parks will be filled early in the week heading in to the holiday weekend so campers who cannot get out to claim a spot until later in the week may need to have a back-up plan.

"Campers may have to drive further or select a different park depending on campsite availability and their arrival time. My advice is for campers to be flexible on campground choice. Maybe try a park that you have not been to before," Szcodronski said.

Currently, Marble Beach, Pilot Knob and Stone state parks have sites with electricity available for reservation. Campsites with electricity are also available at Green Valley and Lake Wapello state parks, which are both in the process of lake renovations. Green Valley Lake is currently 12 feet low and Lake Wapello is completely drained. Dolliver Memorial State Park campground is open for first come, first serve camping. Lewis and Clark State Park campground is open and sites are available for first come, first serve camping while the park renumbers its campsites.

Walnut Woods and George Wyth state park campgrounds are closed until the flood damage can be repaired.

The modern campground at Lake Macbride is currently closed while a scheduled campground renovation is completed. There is the potential that contractors could complete the work at Lake Macbride in time to open for Labor Day. Call the park for the latest information.

MEDIA CONTACT: Kevin Szcodronski, chief, Iowa Department of Natural Resources State Parks Bureau, 515-281-8674.

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CRAPPIE, BLUEGILL LIMIT PROPOSED

Anglers would be limited in the number of crappies and bluegills they could take home, under a regulation change being considered by the Department of Natural Resources.

The agency's Natural Resource Commission has approved a notice of intended action to establish a daily limit of 25 crappies and 25 bluegills on public waters of Iowa. A similar limit is in effect on the Mississippi River. The commission dropped a proposed overall possession limit for the two panfish. The panel split 5-2 on the daily limit question.

There will be hearings on the proposed limit; slated for Atlantic, Cedar Falls, Spirit Lake and Des Moines before a vote on the limit this fall.

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RABBIT, SQUIRREL HUNTING SEASONS OPEN AUG. 30

DES MOINES - The 2008-09 hunting seasons for cottontail rabbits and fox and gray squirrels will open on August 30. Cottontail rabbit numbers are up about 50 percent from last year, and roadside surveys found the population generally increased across the western two-thirds of Iowa, while it declined in the eastern third.

Todd Bogenschutz, upland wildlife research biologist for the DNR, said heavy snowfall this past winter likely reduced the number of does for breeding in eastern Iowa. Research has shown female reproduction improves with wet summer conditions that improve the quality of green vegetation for food and cover.

The DNR's roadside survey indicates the southern and western portions of Iowa will offer the best rabbit numbers this fall. According to Bogenschutz, there are several effective techniques that may be employed to hunt rabbits including stomping brush piles, walking slowly through abandoned farmsteads or along brushy fencerows, or wooded draws.

The best form of rabbit hunting is done with the companionship of one or more beagles, says Bogenschutz. "Beagles and other trailing dogs can increase your success and improve the quality of the hunt," Bogenschutz said.

The cottontail season remains open until February 28, 2009, the daily bag limit is 10, and the possession limit is 20. Shooting hours are from sunrise to sunset. Hunters can view the DNR's roadside counts of cottontails in early September on the DNR's website at <http://www.iowadnr.gov/wildlife/files/upindex.html>

"Squirrel numbers are hard to estimate because we do not survey our squirrel populations, but statewide numbers should be similar to last year," said Todd Gosselink, forest wildlife research biologist for the DNR. "Squirrel populations typically peak following good mast years and last fall we had an average to poor mast crop across Iowa. Red oaks produced a fair crop, but almost no white oaks produced a crop, with a poor hickory crop. However, it was a good walnut crop this past fall."

Fortunately, Iowa's mix of agriculture and woods make an excellent habitat mix for wildlife, and provide plentiful waste grain for squirrels during the non-growing seasons. So squirrels should be maintained at good numbers.

Hunting opportunities for squirrels are excellent in Iowa because hunting pressure is low, says Gosselink. In the early 1960s Iowa had 150,000 squirrel hunters and a harvest of more than 1 million squirrels, compared to last fall where an estimated 23,160 squirrel hunters harvested 169,478 squirrels in the Iowa.

Although forested habitat for squirrels has increased in the state over the last 30 years interest in the sport has declined. Gosselink attributes this decline to more opportunity to hunt other species, like turkey and deer, and the decline in Iowa's rural population.

The squirrel season extends through January 31, 2009, the daily bag limit is 6 (fox and gray squirrels combined) and the possession limit is 12. There is no restriction on shooting hours. Fox squirrels can be found anywhere there are a few acres of trees, but

gray squirrels are generally limited to the heavily forested areas in eastern and southern Iowa.

Squirrel hunting is best done in one of two ways: the sit-and-wait technique and the still-hunting technique. The sit-and-wait technique is used near likely feeding areas such as beneath oak, walnut, or hickory trees or corn-forest edges. The still-hunting technique is employed by slowly walking through forested areas and stopping frequently to watch for feeding squirrels. The best hunting times usually are during the morning and afternoon feeding hours, said Gosselink.

MEDIA CONTACT: Rabbit Season – Todd Bogenschutz, wildlife biologist, at 515-432-2823; Squirrel Season – Todd Gosselink, wildlife biologist, at 515-774-2958

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ARCHERY PROGRAM RECEIVES INDUSTRY GRANT

DES MOINES – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources received a \$25,000 contribution from the Archery Trade Association to help implement the National Archery in the Schools Program (NASP) in Des Moines and to develop community archery programs in conjunction with Des Moines Parks and Recreation.

Currently, Des Moines Lincoln and East high schools, Southeast Polk, Johnston and Des Moines Christian schools are participating. More than 70 schools are participating in the program statewide.

Through the NASP, archery lessons are lead as an in-school curriculum for two weeks as part of physical education. The DNR provides free teacher training and information on how to apply for archery equipment kits through the Iowa Archery in the Schools Foundation.

The DNR also received an additional \$2,000 for the NASP from the Archery Trade Association when DNR Director Richard Leopold won first place in Bucks for Bulls-eyes archery competition, besting agency heads from 15 other states at the Midwestern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies directors meeting in Estes Park, Colo.

MEDIA CONTACT: Ben Berka, shooting sports coordinator for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources, 515-281-0140.

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